

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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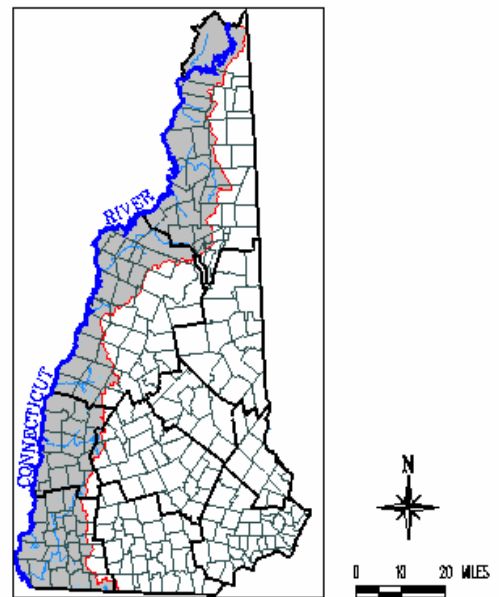
The Connecticut River

Prided as both the largest river in New England and the longest river designated under the New Hampshire Rivers Management and Protection Program, the Connecticut River begins at the outlet of Fourth Connecticut Lake in the town of Pittsburg, N.H. It spans 255 miles, flowing along 26 New Hampshire communities and 27 communities in Vermont before entering Massachusetts where it continues its course towards Long Island Sound. The Connecticut River's designation into the NH Rivers Program is unique in that members of the local river management advisory committees for the Connecticut represent both New Hampshire and Vermont, creating an interstate partnership for protection of the common and valuable resource. The river was designated into the program in July 1992.

The Connecticut River is the focal point of a watershed, which drains 11,250 square miles, 3,928 square miles in Vermont and 3,046 square miles in New Hampshire. The river carves its course past rolling hills, forests, fields, communities, and residential areas, dropping more than 2,480 feet in elevation as it winds south to the border of Massachusetts.

To conserve, protect, and enhance the diversity of species that exist in the vast Connecticut River Watershed, the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge Act was passed in 1991. The US Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the program, has identified special focus areas throughout the watershed, including sites in Vermont and New Hampshire, where resources are deemed highly valuable. The agency will direct its efforts for protection of these sites through various programs, including environmental education and habitat management.

The Connecticut Lakes and Mid-Connecticut River Valley Regions have also been recognized as high priority areas for the New Hampshire Resource Protection Project due to the quality natural resource base in each area. The targeted resources include: wildlife habitat, drinking water supplies, forestry, agriculture, recreation potential as well as pollution threats. Since 1994, this project has brought together professionals from over 20 public and private agencies to work to protect valuable resources in these and four other



areas across the state that are recognized to have strong natural resource bases. Specifically, an old growth lowland white spruce-balsam fir forest, trout spawning reef, and habitat for a globally rare orchid have been cited for protection in the Connecticut River Valley.

History/Geology

The Connecticut River Valley is internationally renowned as a glacial geology research site for the examination of sediment deposition that occurred in glacial Lake Hitchcock as the ice sheet receded. Lake Hitchcock once spanned the area from Middleton, Conn., north to Bath, N.H. Bedrock exposures and cuts are the principal source of observation and collection for scientific research and refinement of the geological history of the Appalachian Mountains, dating back 450 million years. The river course is also important to scientists in developing quantitative models of erosional dynamics such as meandering.

There are numerous archeological sites along the Connecticut River as well. The Sokoki people and their ancestors, of the Abenaki language family, settled the area, hunting, fishing and gathering in its waters and along its banks. It is estimated that the population of Native Americans in the valley exceeded 4000, before declining due to warfare and diseases such as smallpox in the 1630s. Large archeological sites occur throughout the valley on upper and lower terraces as well as near tributaries' confluences with the Connecticut. Two sites of particular mention, both of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, are rock engravings of numerous faces at Bellows Falls, Vt., and a site in Claremont, N.H., settled by Native Americans around 800 A.D.

The earliest permanent European settlement took place in 1743 at Fort #4 in what is now Charlestown, N.H. In the 1790s and early 1800s, a system of canals was built on the Connecticut River that allowed access upstream to Woodsville, N.H. Railroads, built in the 1850s, allowed even greater access to the area, allowing for increased tourism and industry which continue to grow today. There are ten bridges on the Connecticut River that are registered with the National Register of Historic Places including the famous Cornish-Windsor Bridge, the longest remaining covered bridge in the United States, spanning 460 feet. Numerous New Hampshire communities along the river are home to sites also registered as historic places including those in Haverhill, Lyme, Lebanon, Claremont, Charlestown and Hinsdale.

Wildlife Habitat

Whether it be lynx or pine marten in the boreal spruce-fir forests or migrating Canada geese, songbirds and waterfowl congregating along the river and its agricultural areas, valuable wildlife habitat is a very precious resource in the Connecticut River Valley. The river and its corridor provide a variety of habitats for nearly 300 species of native vertebrate animals including several endangered and threatened species. The dwarf wedge mussel is one of the federally-listed endangered species found in the valley. The Connecticut River boasts the largest population of this species in the world.

Uncommon Vegetation

The Connecticut River Valley supports a rich and diverse selection of plant communities as well. Of particular mention is the Jesup's milk-vetch, a federally listed endangered species of which the only known occurrences are along the Connecticut River. Habitats which provide some of the rarest and most remarkable ecological communities along the Connecticut River include: floodplain forests, seasonally-flooded riverside forests which provide nesting sites for

unusual warblers and bald eagles and where ostrich fern and green dragon inhabit the forest floor; riverside seeps and outcrops, gravelly and sandy bank areas kept moist by seeping groundwater which host some of the rarest plants in New England including the previously mentioned Jesup's milk-vetch; and calcareous wetlands, calcium rich wetland areas which grow many rare orchids.

Recreation

The Connecticut River and its valley provide New Hampshire with some of its most valuable scenic views. The river provides glimpses of long stretches of whitewater surrounding wetlands full of wildlife, and vast expanses of agricultural fields and farmlands. Distant peaks, town hall steeples, and traditional New England homes such as those in Orford are other sites admired by tourists and recreationalists alike. Scenic highlights of the region include the Cornish-Windsor covered bridge and the St. Gaudens' National Historic Site, with its commanding view of Mt. Ascutney.

Snowmobile trails are very popular in the northern reaches of the river while bike trails are cited in almost every town from Littleton to Walpole. The trails on Mount Pulaski, Percy Peaks and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail offer picturesque views of the river. Various towns have visitor centers offering swimming, hiking, ball fields and picnic sites.

Fishing

The Connecticut is a nationally recognized trout fishing river, cited in national magazines such as *Fly Fisherman*. Hundreds of people from across the country and Canada visit New Hampshire each year to fish in its waters. The NH Fish and Game Department helps to meet angler demand by stocking approximately 33,750 trout into the Connecticut River each year. Trout are one of approximately 32 species of fish that reside in the Connecticut River. Warm water species including perch, bass, pickerel, walleye and pike are found in much of the main stem of the river below Lancaster. Cold water species, including trout, are found in the northern stretches of the river as well as in areas below Lancaster at the mouths of tributaries. The river also sustains a population of anadromous fish including shad and alewife.



One of the most active Atlantic salmon restoration efforts in New England is being conducted on the Connecticut River. The NH Fish and Game Department stocks approximately 150,000 salmon fry each year in tributaries to the Connecticut River. An aggressive fish ladder program is also being carried out on the river. To date, fish ladders have been installed as far

upstream as Wilder Dam in Lebanon. As salmon populations recover the need for additional upstream ladders will be evaluated.

Boating

The Connecticut River offers a wide variety of boating opportunities from the Third Connecticut Lake to Long Island Sound. In New Hampshire boating begins in Pittsburg with whitewater stretches for expert kayakers and canoeists and continues to Hinsdale where hundreds of people enjoy flatwater boating and motorized boating. Two popular whitewater sections are at Lymans Fall in Columbia, and at Sumner Falls in Cornish. Access can be gained at any of the approximately 50 access sites along the river in New Hampshire or the 36 sites in Vermont.

Local Advisory Committees

Due to its great length and land area, the Connecticut River has five subcommittees that are working to create and implement a management plan for the river. These are: Headwaters, Riverbend, Upper Valley, Ascutney, and Wantastiquet Subcommittees. The Connecticut River Joint Commissions, made up of the VT Connecticut River Watershed Advisory Commission and the NH Connecticut River Valley Resources Commission is the supervisory unit for these subcommittees and works to coordinate efforts between the two states' protection and management goals for the river.

For More Information

For further information about the N.H. Rivers Management and Protection Program go to <http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/rivers/index.htm> or contact Steve Couture, Rivers Coordinator, 29 Hazen Drive, PO Box 95, Concord, NH 03302-0095; (603) 271-8801; steven.couture@des.nh.gov.